

Realization

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WALTER CAZALET was a man in his late sixties, but his hair had only a tinge of gray. He had prided himself on his youthful appearance, and even though death was now near there was a young look about his fixed stare. His eyes were not those of a dying man but were bright and clear, looking for a greater conquest. All of Cazalet's life had been a series of conquests. Death was surely not the end for him. He had always looked upon death as a great adventure—a challenge not only for the body but also for the mind and spirit. Cazalet was not the type of man to pass up any challenge.

The doctor placed his hand on Cazalet's wrist. Gently he searched for a pulse. The room seemed suspended in a vacuum. The silence was like a huge cat waiting to spring at a given signal. Then the doctor placed the hand under the covers, and pulled the sheet over the quiet face.

"How dare you do that? I'm not dead." Cazalet tried to stir, but found it impossible to move. He tried desperately to sit up—it was no use. It was as if a great weight were on his body, holding him down.

"Nurse." The doctor closed his grip and crossed the room.

"Yes, doctor."

"Call the family and have them make arrangements for the funeral. I'll sign the papers tomorrow."

"Yes, doctor."

The doctor paused at the door. "Oh! Be sure you close his eyes. It might be necessary to weight them down. If you don't, they may have a difficult time closing them later."

"All right, doctor."

On the bed, Cazalet struggled. "That old fool. I'm not dead. I'm just as much alive as he is. If I could only raise my body—If I could only—I can't. I can't." In utter desperation, he settled on his pillow, waiting for the nurse to come close enough to hear his weakened voice.

She crossed the room and switched on the bedside lamp. She folded the sheet neatly below Cazalet's chin and for a moment paused to look into his eyes. He must have been a handsome man when he was younger, she reflected. Then, placing her hand over his eyelids, she forced them shut.

"Don't do that. Don't touch me. I'm not dead! Can't you hear me? I'm not dead!" he shouted.

Once again the sheet was placed over his head, and the nurse left the room to telephone his family.

"I'm not dead." He was quite emphatic this time, as if this would be his last opportunity to prove his living. "I'm just as much alive as they are . . . maybe a little more. I always said that Doc

Vincent was a quack, but I never thought he was stupid enough to think me dead when I've still got years of life left in me! I'll sue him for every cent he's got. I wish that nurse hadn't closed my eyes; I can't see a thing, and it's too difficult to open them. Maybe if I rested, my strength might return. I'll show them! I'll sue every last one of them. I'll sue every . . . one . . . of. . . ."

It was difficult for Cazalet to determine how long he had slept, but he was sure that he was now quite awake. He could not open his eyes, but the rest of his senses were very much with him. His sense of smell was especially keen. He seemed to be in a room filled with flowers, and yet he could not distinguish the different types. For a man who had worked with flowering plants all his life, this was not very satisfying. In fact, they made him feel sick at his stomach. Thinking of his stomach, he realized that he had not eaten for some time, and yet he was not especially hungry. Quite the opposite: he felt full. He tried to move . . . no use. There seemed to be people milling around him, and yet not with him at all. As long as he could remember, he had never felt that way before. It was as if they were off in a dream world; yet he could hear them very well.

"Doesn't he look natural? Just like he was sound asleep," someone whispered.

"I think he's turning a little dark," another replied.

"I know, but Mr. Cazalet always did look nice. I remember seeing him several times just before he died, and even then he gave me the impression that he was trying to hold on."

"*Died!* I'm not dead," he thought. "What makes these people think I'm dead? This must be a trick . . . a hoax. That's what it is. Well, it's not funny . . . not at all."

"Walter was a good man. He had his faults, but don't we all?" An elderly man stood very close to the bronze-plated casket, with his hat held very tightly in front of him. "We had our fights, but there was never very much to them."

"That sounds like Bill. Maybe he'll see that I'm not dead. I'll concentrate on moving one part of my body, but which part? It has to be something small and easy to move. My finger . . . that's it. I'll concentrate all my strength on the small finger of my right hand. I'll try to raise it. Surely he will be able to see it. My finger . . . Bill . . . watch my finger . . . *look at my finger!*" Desperately Cazalet tried to bring movement into that small part of his body, but even total strength was not enough.

"So long, old friend . . . see you later." Bill was gone.

"Bill . . . Bill . . . Please come back! Don't leave me! Don't let them do this to me! I never asked for anything in my life, but I'm begging now. Please don't leave me! Won't somebody please listen to me? I might have some enemies in business, but I'm well liked. Why would anyone want to do this to me?"

"Aren't the flowers beautiful, Mother?" A young girl and her mother side-stepped a basket of flowers to get a better look at the

coffin.

"Yes, dead, they are," she replied. "Poor man . . ."

"What do you mean, poor, Mother? He had more money than we will ever see."

"I know, dear, but money isn't everything." The lady slipped her hand up to the coffin and felt the satin lining. "They certainly are putting him away nice."

"They can afford to," her daughter said quickly. "He left enough behind."

"I know, dear, but his family got very little of it. He left most of the money to his foundation."

"Isn't that just like him, though, cutting his family off? In spite of everything, they loved him. Watch it, Mother, there's another couple trying to get a closer look. Excuse me . . ."

"He looks so natural, doesn't he, darling?"

"I suppose so," the man replied, "but pneumonia always leaves a person quite natural." He glanced around the room, looking for familiar faces. "Not many people here yet, but then he wasn't very well liked. I understand that he drank so much that his constitution was weakened."

"No! Well, you know there has been talk that he had a terrible disposition."

"I can believe that. He was an old grouch at the office. That is, when he came to the office. Let's go home, dear, I'm tired and hungry. Some of the others have left."

"We have to pay our respects," she answered. "We have to pay our respects to the family."

"Then can we go?"

"Yes, dear."

Cazalet lay there in his coffin, taken aback by the comments made by his friends. Outwardly there was no change in his expression, but inwardly he was sickened by the apparent cruelty and selfishness of the world. There was no friendship left for him and others like him. If I am dead, he thought, shouldn't someone come and take me away from all this agonizing talk? Shouldn't someone come to help me? Once again the overpowering need for sleep swept over his body.

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Cazalet found it difficult to say how long he had lain in the cold earth that made up his grave. Many years had passed, for his skin was tight against his skull and sections of the coffin had given way to the relentless struggle of the earth. He often tried to reason out what had happened to him, but it never quite made sense. He thought of the world outside—the free world where life was not enclosed by walls and where a man's spirit might roam at will. He longed for the simple pleasures of life, the things from which he had gained such

great personal satisfaction. He longed to walk and ride horseback and fish and talk to people and . . .

He cried out, "Doesn't anyone care? Won't someone save me from the torture of reality? This is death. I'm dead. My crumbling body and spirit must remain within the confines of these walls for eternity. And I am conscious of every minute of it. I long so for the freedom which I will never again have. This must be. . . ." His mind had descended to a point of despair which was the lowest it had ever reached. Suddenly everything was clear. Yes, he was dead, and he would remain in his coffin for eternity and remain conscious of every change in his physical and mental state, and he would be able to do nothing about it.

He tried to break loose from the bonds that held him, and screamed. "I'm dead! This is Hell . . . This is *my* Hell!"

On the other side of the cemetery, the rays of the setting sun were filtering through the mud-stained windows of the caretaker's cottage. "You know, Pete, I was clearing some brush away from those tombstones in the old part of the cemetery today, and I would swear that I heard a man scream."

The old caretaker flicked the ashes from his pipe into his hand and answered, "I've heard things over in that section myself, but it's only our imagination. Why, the newest grave over there is seventy-five years old or more. I would say that they would be good and dead by now."

ALONE IN AUTUMN

Tortured trees
Beyond my window
Twist and tear my soul;
Clouds of gray
In a sky of steel
Wildly toss and roll.

Drifts of leaves
In a dusty wind
Swirl and spiral apart—
Only to settle,
Covering the ground
And my aching heart.

—SUE WINGER